08-54 1007 Earl Carrillo Oral History

Tape - Forestville, July 14, 1998

Conversation starts in progress, the beginning of the tape is scratched.

What was your first impression of the railway as you remember it?

EC: It was the only transportation that there was, otherwise horse and buggy. I went to school two years on the electric. It was our transportation. It went out as far as Forestville, it was James Station where we used to catch it, then they changed the name to Garborough it's just at bottom of the hill here.

I: Did the lumber industry effected by the railroad or not?

EC: What I can remember it was Gravenstein apples. I think that was the main thing. All the spur tacks were filled with refers. I can even remember when they shipped Gravenstein apples on the 4th of July. And this year they are marbles.

I: What products other than the apples?

EC: There were a lot of peaches in those days. In fact there was a post office on Green Valley Rd. they called in Peachland Post Office. When Doris Sullivan was still alive, I knew her quite well. I asked her if she remembered where that post office was. She said I sure do, it was where the Williams Bros entrance went into the slue where the bridge went across the slew. I think that's how they got into their house, now they go in from Ross Road farther up.

I: Did the P&SR affect business?

EC: They depended on for everything.

I: So people could order flour or seed?

EC: I can tell you what I remember of it, they ran freight service up until they tore up the tracks. Then they changed to diesel after electric.

I: That was around 1947.

EC: I can remember years ago, I had a kind of fascination for blacksmith shops because my father had been a blacksmith but he passed away in 1906. It was in my mind so I got acquainted with the blacksmith in Graton. I used to stop in there after grammar school went down through Graton to get some cows that were on the track and bring them up here. He'd 6 or 7 of them and I would drop them off at different places. Frank used to go down nearly every day to the Graton Station and get iron and stuff that they hauled in on the freight and pack it up to the blacksmith shop.

I: As far as downtown Forestville. Did the railway build that up in anyway?

EC: I had a book on the railroad and when Jack Daveiro had his barn and John, that's Jack's son and I gave it to him.

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EC: The earthquake in 1906 a few little things had happened. I wasn't too old, I was born December 1903.

IP: Can you tell us about the earthquake?

EC: We had a fireplace that came through the floor, through the ceiling and the roof and it came down in a big mess. The mantle, see there were all coal ore lanterns, and they all fell off the mantle. It's more from hearsay, them remembering. My mother was in the front bedroom and us kids were in the back. She went past the fireplace, that was in the living room. She cut her foot on broken glass. But I remember the carpenters coming in and cleaning the brick out and patching the ceiling and roof.

My father died July 14, 1906.

I: Did the earthquake destroy a lot of property?

EC: Yes, there's no foundations, but it knocked the chimney's down. I happened about 6 a.m. so people didn't have any fires going or anything.

I: Did you have any close calls on the railroad?

EC: I can remember being scared a few times, the cows had no sense and you had to drive them across the tracks.

The name of Burt Vale as a motorman and when they ever hit a cow or something, they said Bert must have been drunk. He got blamed for it.

I: Tom Wright was a motorman too.

EC: He was a conductor; I don't remember him being a motorman. There were several motormen, but Burt Vale was one I can remember distinctly.

I: Mr. Yeagers uncle, his name was Ezra, he said he was a section foreman.

EC: Gosh, I seems I remember a foreman, I think he was Silva. He was the head of a section gang too. I wouldn't swear to that.

Then the railroad went south down to Cunningham, Hessel.

I: Jim Nagy went to school from Cunningham and would watch the train going the other way to Sebastopol. He came north and you guys were heading south.

EC: I have a picture of the Analy High School that was taken in 1919. I'll show you.

Looking at the photo:

I think some are still alive. Ronald Winkler, Jack Robinson was in that (photo). There must be 200 who graduated and when I graduated I don't think there were even 50. They gave me a yearbook and a red rose.

McCormick, he was brakeman or something when he got run over and lost both legs. I went to school with his son, Buss McCormick, I think he's dead now. He had a brother who went to Santa Rosa I didn't know too well.

I: Any important events that you remember like the end of the WWI?
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EC: I had a bakery in town from 1943 to 1946. That was all during WWII.

I: Did you get your flour from the freight?

EC: We had a Sperry Flour Company on Wilson Street in Santa Rosa. I used to have a trailer that I pulled behind my car and I used to go over there and get a load of flour and I would save about $.40 to $.50 a sack on it. In those days were worth a dollar or two not I don't think it's worth $.05. It's a same, at the rate it's going in another 20 years it won't be worth anything.

I: You must have been a kid when there were two fires where they lost two steamer boats, one was the Steamer Gold.

EC: Steamer Gold, they had one up here that ran in recent times. There was a lot of traffic on those slews back then even before the railroads were there, even out to Schellville. They had a loading dock and the Napa River. Steamer Gold ran up there for a long time. Tomales Bay, the narrow gauge railroad, when it was first built it came from Sausalito and then it went to Point Reyes and then they broad gauged it from Sausalito to Point Reyes and then it was narrow from Point Reyes to Cazadero.

I got out of high school in 1923, I got a job, and I could drive an automobile before I got out of high school. I must have been 15 or 16 when I started driving. I got a drivers license in 1921 and I still have a driver's license and I'll be 95 in December.

I: Back to the idea of what put the railroad out of business.

EC: I think they made a mistake in taking it out. These big rigs are the ones causing big trouble.

In 1915 when they had a fair, the Worlds Fair in San Francisco. My mother and I took an electric train from here to Sebastopol, took a steam train from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa transferred from there and went to Sausalito and then took the fairy to San Francisco. I can't remember how we got to the fair, seems to me that we walked. It was up by Giradelli Square, they still have the Palace of Fine Arts.

I: The electric railway system was something, they always say they are going to bring it back, do you think they will.

EC: I think they have to do something, there's just too much traffic on the roads. Sometimes you could walk faster than the traffic goes. I may be old fashioned but I think they made a big mistake taking it out.

All those politicians and contractors are the one who want to widen Hwy. 101. And just look at the elections, only about 40% of the people are voting. I think we have to vote and at least try or we are going to loose an awful good country.

Fourth Street in Santa Rosa went down as far as where the Safeway Store is where Grace Bros. Pork was there, that was the end of the line. And when I was a kid we would ride the train to the end of the line and then walk back. Whenever a steam train came in we would head to the depot to watch the train come in.

I: Do you remember any other names other than the ones you told me, Berry?

EC: Berry, he lived down on the southern end of Sebastopol, he had a house down there. There was a conductor with the name of Williams and Kanib. I went to school with a Kanib, there was one older and one about my age.

I: The station seemed to be the center of town.

EC: It was, and the post office from there up to high street was a vacant lot and that's where they had the apples show. They'd put up a big circus tent, I've got some pictures of that. I'd be glad to show them to you sometime.

They had a Dutch windmill and they covered it with dried apples and apples. They made it at actual size.

I: They did a bank onetime.

EC: An ox team and covered wagon. I know the pictures are around somewhere.

I: I'll have to come back sometime.

EC: You will because when I get started I don't know when to stop.

I: Do you remember of any accidents of the train on that steep hill in Forestville?

EC: Well nothing serious, now Austin Creek and Cazadero the narrow gauge. Several people were drowned.

I: This system was efficient, it ran every hour and there were no accidents.

EC: It was, and it was the main transportation here.

I can remember a lot of Hindu with turbans on their heads. They used to clear brush land out along the river. They walked up Guerneville Road right past here with maybe 12 or more in a group. Then they would come back by. I think they were from India. People don't remember that. There were a lot of Italians, they came here in the early 1910's.

My great grandmother, Maria Carrillo. Maria Carrillo High School is named after her. She built the first house in Santa Rosa around 1837 I guess.

What ruined California was when they found gold; it was a pretty good country up until then.

I: Your grandmother was Maria Carrillo, I didn't realize that.

EC: My great grandmother was Maria Carrillo. My grandmother was Vallejo's wife's sister. Vallejo's wife was a Carrillo. That's how my grandmother came up here when her husband died in San Diego. She had 8 or 10 kids, loaded them up in an oxen wagon up the El Camino Real. Then she stayed in Sonoma for a couple of years, then she got granted 600 or 800 acres in Santa Rosa and that's where she built her home.

I: I've been working on Jasper O'Farrell, he has a great granddaughter who is interested in it.

EC: He came up here as a surveyor. I remember when the old O'Farrell house was on the other side of O'Farrell Hill. A big two story house in the cotton wood trees. I think they tore it down recently. It was right where the highway make a turn. You know Freestone isn't were Freestone is now.
END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO:

I: You were telling me about you went to sea.

EC: Oh yes, I got an eye infection and had to go to a marine hospital, I spent three months on Staten Island. By that time I decided I wanted to get back to California, so I got a train ticket. Back then they wanted to ship you to Los Angeles. I told them I didn't want to go that way, I wanted to go to Salt Lake City and then San Francisco. So they found a route. I went to Denver and took the Denver Rio Grande Railroad to Salt Lake City. I guess they tore that up too. They had to give me several transfers to get me there, so I could stop and see some family there.

I: Were you in the Navy?

EC: Merchant Marines, that was after WWI and before WWII.

I went to work in a bakery, the old Royal Bakery.

I left from San Francisco... you know Del Monte had those Alaska Canners, they'd take those sailboats out put up their sails and go up the Bearing Sea. I went on a steamer, we went up as far as Puget Sound and down to Settle. We went from Astoria up the Columbia River to a small town.

We ran aground up the Columbia River once.

I: Were they carrying general freight?

EC: I think it was copper ore that was loaded down in the boat. I was on two boats. The other had lumber on the deck 10-12 piles high. We ran into a storm in Mexico before they could shut the engine down and steer into the wave. it the waves came up over all that lumber. That was a old time boat, they had two men up in the front part of it.

I: Did you go through the canal?

EC: Yes, that was in 1924 it hadn't been open very long. It was built in 1914. You could see where the French had dug their part and they hadn't planned on using locks, then the government took over. They had to get rid of the mosquitos and then finish it.

I: When you got back from the Merchant Marines was the electric train still working?

EC: I went to work in the bakery in 1925, in the Royal Bakery until 1933. Then there was the Sebastopol Bakery across from the post office. The Post Office used to be on the corner of McKinley St. and Main St. where the dry goods store was before they build the new one on South Main St.

I: I think I know where you're talking about. Isn't there a lumber store there now?

EC: Carlson's was on the corner, they went out of business.

I: See I was right across the street and the Ford Garage was right next door to me up to the service station on, Jag Alley. We called it that, Wilton Avenue that came down to McKinley. McKinley comes up from where Spease used to be.

When I was going to high school in 1920 we started having boxing and wrestling in school. One of the students had a friend in San Francisco with the newspaper company. He ask him if he could find a well known person who could referee the fights. And he got Jack Dempsey, that was in 1920.

He came up and I wrestled in one of matches, I was a freshman then.

END OF INTERVIEW